Ministry of Agriculture

Farm & Food Report

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DIVERSIFYING FARM INCOME A "SNAP" FOR MONTMARTRE PAIR

You may have heard the old saying, "Build a better mousetrap and nature will build a better mouse." Norm Englot and Kevin Shiplack, both farmers in the Montmartre area, found a way to supplement their farm incomes by building better mousetrap bait – and the mice aren't very happy about it.

Their product, Bet'r Bait, hit store shelves in the region on February 22 of this year.

The venture was Englot's idea. When he sought to deal with some pesky mice in his shop, his wife objected when he pulled the jar of peanut butter out of the cupboard. "She gave me a cross-eyed look and told me I couldn't take it out to the shop, and I was wondering, 'How am I going to get some peanut butter out there?'"

Englot spotted a syringe to be used for vaccinating his cattle. He found that the syringe was easy to fill using a butter knife. When he began to bait the traps, Englot knew he was onto an idea. "I thought 'Holy, this comes out nice and slick!'"

With the discovery of an entrepreneurial idea, Englot recruited a business partner in his friend, Kevin Shiplack. Shiplack agreed, and the partnership of Bet'r Bait was formed.

The product features a secret bait and superior packaging. Not only are syringes clean and easy to use, but they are also an economical way to package the bait. A syringe containing 1.5 millilitres of bait can supply three applications.

Englot remains tight-lipped about the ingredients of the bait, but he indicates that the inputs have an agricultural base, though it is not something that he produces himself. The Bet'r Bait website claims the non-toxic substance is more effective than either peanut butter or cheese.

Bet'r Bait currently ranges from $2.59 to $2.99 at retail outlets such as Peavey Mart, Cowtown and a variety of local businesses. They have recently acquired a Winnipeg-based distributor to secure relationships with major national stores, as well.

Englot and Shiplack set out to pursue their business idea as a means of diversifying their farm incomes. In addition to cattle production, Englot seeds 3,000 acres to durum, canola, peas, flax and oats. Shiplack also grows a variety of crops.

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"I think it's important to try to find something to help along farm income, and possibly create something for our children to do, too," Shiplack said.

Assembly of the product provided casual work for the partners' children. Due to growth in the scale of production, Bet'r Bait has enlisted the services of the Saskatchewan Abilities Council to package the bait.

In the future, Shiplack hopes to create employment closer to home. "We want to keep the business local and maybe create a job or two for a small town. That would help a lot." The partners have their sights set on their hometown of Montmartre, where Shiplack is a member of the economic development committee.

In the marketplace, Shiplack notes that the bait is useful to urban customers, but Englot does not rule out the importance of fellow farmers as a target market. "We are farmer-owned, farmer-invented," said Englot, a characteristic in which both partners take pride.

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